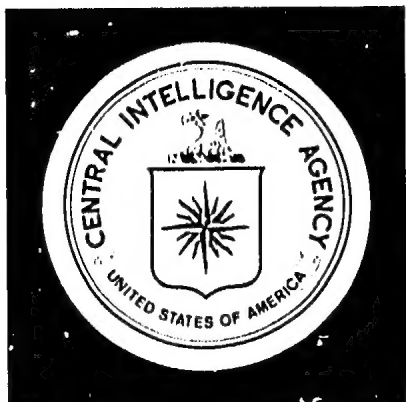


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Developments in Indochina

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DEVELOPMENTS IN INDOCHINA*(Information as of 1500)*Page

SOUTH VIETNAM

1

The government is still organizing the Democracy Party and the Popular Front at the district and village level, but in many areas these organizations are not very active. South Vietnamese forces are moving to counter Communist military pressure north of Saigon. Hanoi and the Viet Cong are charging the US with violations of the cease-fire. The Communists are repairing two more airfields in South Vietnam.

LAOS

4

Skirmishing continues in the Sedone Valley. The military and political commissions are meeting again and the atmosphere is more cordial.

CAMBODIA

5

Government operations along Route 2 are not making any progress.

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INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

7

Tokyo finally has its invitation to Hanoi, but the North Vietnamese intend to push for Japanese recognition of the Viet Cong.

SOUTH VIETNAMGovernment Political Organizations

Organizational efforts for the government's political bodies--the Popular Front and the Democracy Party--continue to have a high priority. Both groups have been set up in almost every province, and the organizers are now active at the district and village level.

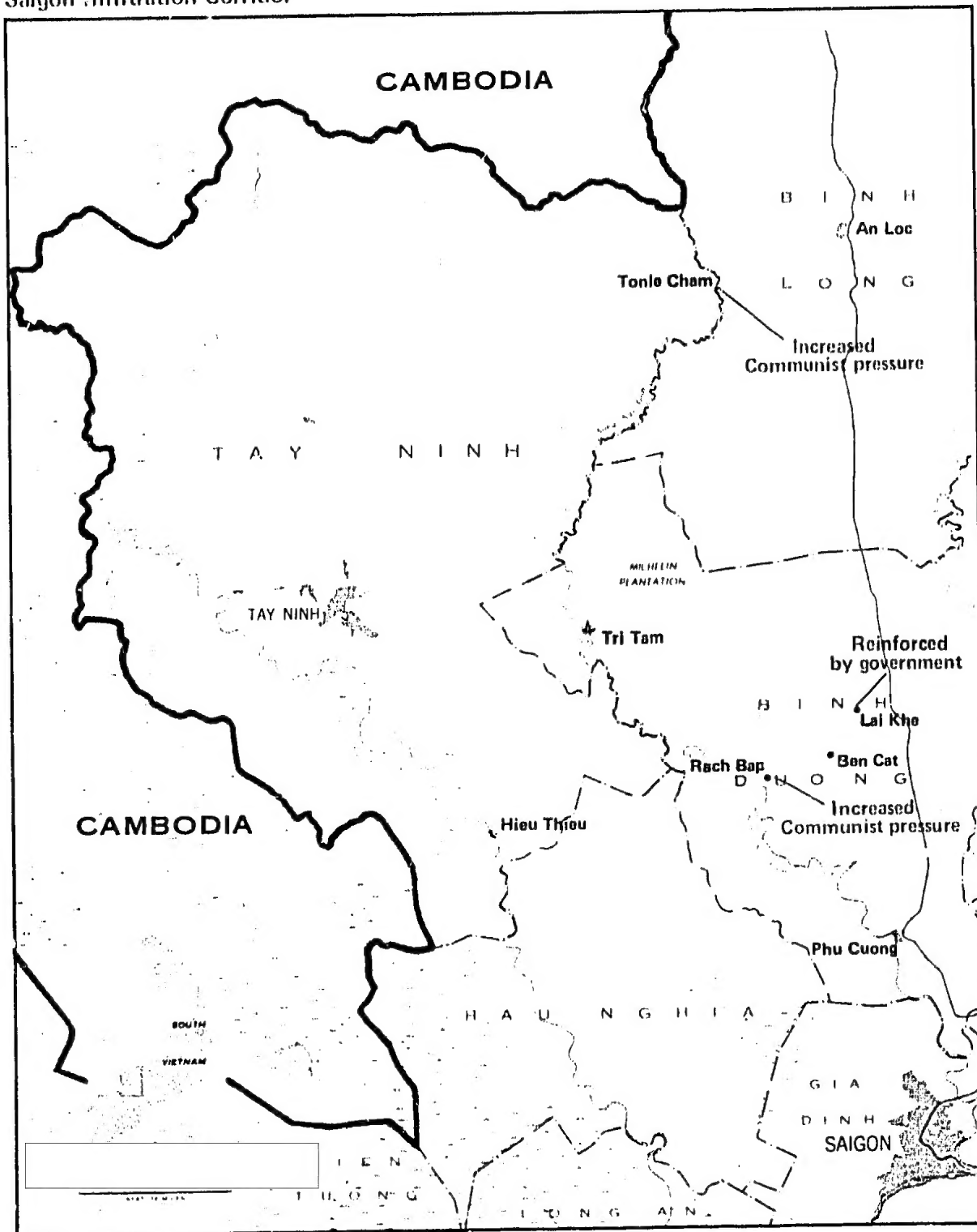
There continue to be indications that the Front may be designed more to provide a show of unity among non-Communist groups than to carry out specific programs. In some provinces, the Front has done almost nothing since its public inaugural. US Embassy officers in Military Region 2 report that often province-level leaders of the Front are also head of the province chapters of the Democracy Party and are confused about what they are supposed to do in their various functions.

In contrast to the Front, the Democracy Party still seems intended to be a lasting and active organization. A possible indication of the importance Saigon attaches to it is the recent replacement of the deputy chief of Phong Dinh Province and the deputy mayor of Can Tho City for inadequately performing their Democracy Party duties. According to embassy officers, the two officials--previously well regarded--were occupied with pressing administrative matters when they allegedly failed to give enough attention to planning a Democracy Party meeting. Their removal is now being interpreted as a warning to civil servants not to neglect party responsibilities.

The embassy reports that, while there is little public enthusiasm for the government organizations, neither has there been much opposition to them. Some anti-government groups are still complaining of pressure tactics by Democracy Party recruiters

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Saigon Infiltration Corridor



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and are accusing President Thieu of trying to control all non-Communist political activity. Many politically aware Vietnamese, however, appear to accept the creation of both the Front and the Democracy Party as practical steps for dealing with the cease-fire period and the political struggle with the Communists.

The Military Situation

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The government is moving to counter increased Communist main force pressure north of Saigon.

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The US and South Vietnam have called the attention of the Four-Party Joint Military Commission to the Communist cease-fire violations in the area, and South Vietnam's commander for Military Region 3 has warned that he will resort to heavy artillery against the Communists if necessary.

There has been a substantial increase in Communist shellings and ground actions against government observation points along the major North Vietnamese infiltration routes in this region. Two such positions, near the Tonle Cham Cambodian border and Rach Bap in the Lai Khe area, have been forced to abandon much of their monitoring activity and are partly isolated. According to a South Vietnamese assessment, units of the North Vietnamese 7th Division are responsible for most of the current military action.

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Communist Countercharges

In the first Vietnamese Communist response to President Nixon's warnings against infiltration, the

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[REDACTED]

Viet Cong's Liberation Radio picked up Hanoi's recent charge that the US violated North Vietnamese airspace on 12 and 13 March by conducting reconnaissance flights. The broadcast also criticized alleged shipments of arms and ammunition from US bases in Japan to Vietnam. These new charges were accompanied by the now familiar recital on the rate of troop withdrawals, mine removal, and dismantling of US bases. [REDACTED]

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More Communist Airfields?

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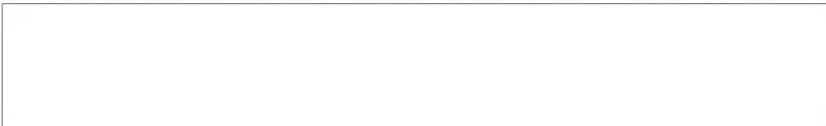
Photography [REDACTED] shows that the Communists are repairing the airfield at A Luoi in the A Shau Valley of western Thua Thien Province. Another airfield is being repaired near the Communist-held district capital of Dak To in western Kontum Province, according to South Vietnamese reconnaissance. These discoveries raise to three the number of airfields so far noted under repair in Communist-controlled areas. The first was detected at Khe Sanh in northwestern Quang Tri Province, but is not known to have been used. [REDACTED]

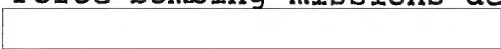
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LAOSThe Military Situation


Skirmishing continued in the Sedone Valley in the southern panhandle on 15 March. Government and Communist troops fought for control of a village some 20 miles northeast of Khong Sedone. Elsewhere, field commanders reported no significant incidents. The number of Lao Air Force bombing missions declined sharply on 15 March. 

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Movement on Talks

The joint groups assigned to work out military and political details of the peace agreement resumed meetings on 15 March, after a delay of several days because of a dispute over procedural matters. A government spokesman said that the political group has discussed many issues, including the apportionment of portfolios in a new coalition government. He also reported that both sides had agreed to form the new government by 23 March--as required by the accord. The group charged with working out military problems reportedly made similar headway.

Apparently no decisions have been made on basic issues, however. These will require negotiations between Prime Minister Souvanna and senior Lao Communist envoys, as well as between Souvanna and leaders of the Lao right wing--who will strongly object to losing any major portfolios to the Communists.



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CAMBODIA

The Military Situation

The government operation to reopen Route 2 between Phnom Penh and the provincial capital of Takeo made no progress on 15 March. Government units moving south along the highway remain some eight miles north of Chambak, while other units attempting to retake Chambak from the west are still in position some five miles west of the town. Elsewhere, the government is continuing to send reinforcements to the Neak Luong area in preparation for a sweep of the Mekong's east bank from Neak Luong to the South Vietnamese border. Military activity in the Neak Luong area remains light.

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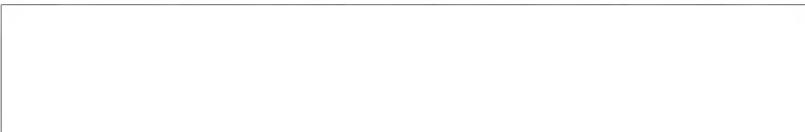
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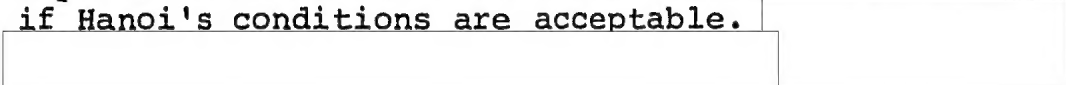
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INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTSTokyo Making Headway With Hanoi

Hanoi has finally agreed to receive a Japanese Foreign Ministry delegation, but the Japanese can expect some tough talk from the North Vietnamese. Foreign Minister Ohira announced on 15 March that the mission led by the Ministry's Southeast Asia specialist, will probably leave in April for a week's visit to discuss aid and future diplomatic relations.

A Japanese Embassy official in Washington told State Department officials on 16 March that Hanoi has attempted to exploit Tokyo's interest in playing a role in Vietnamese rehabilitation by linking the issue to Japanese recognition of the PRG. Hanoi apparently believes that it may have some leverage in view of Japanese public opinion favoring improved ties with North Vietnam. Ultimately Hanoi probably will not press the PRG recognition issue very hard in the face of Japanese resistance.

One prominent Japanese newspaper quotes informed sources as claiming that Tokyo hopes to establish diplomatic relations with North Vietnam this summer, if Hanoi's conditions are acceptable.



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